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CHRISTMAS AT TAPPAN SEA

MARY
CAROLINE
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CHRISTMAS

AT

TAPPAN SEA.



“Then with a stiff-jointed effort.”

CHRISTMAS
AT
TAPPAN SEA.

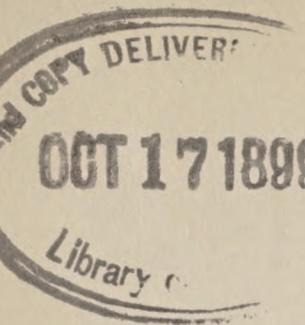
BY
MARY CAROLINE HYDE,

AUTHOR OF
“GOOSTIE” AND “UNDER THE STABLE FLOOR.”

BOSTON:
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY.

[1899]

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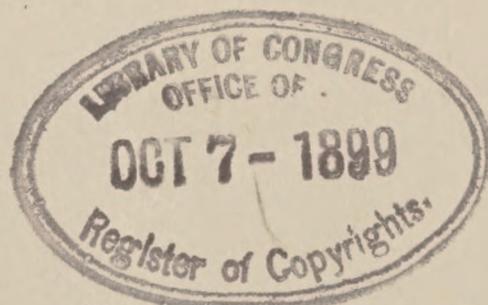
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Oct. 7. 99.

TO
LESLEY GREEN SHEAVER.

88c+d
88c+d

Christmas at Tappan Sea.

Here were records of old times . . . and here they have been miraculously preserved by Saint Nicholas.—IRVING, *Wolfert's Roost*.

I.

IT was a July afternoon in that part of 1700 that touched within a few years of our own century. Bees, butterflies, and a humming-bird or two honey-hunted in the vines which hung about the little Dutch panes of the kitchen window near which Nochie sat all alone, trying to knit; but stitches would drop, her hands grew sticky

and warm, and she drew a sigh so deep that it wrinkled her stomacher as she counted and found her stint but half done.

The outside of one window-pane was so covered with green leaves that it made a looking-glass, which reflected the edge of the small round quilted cap, set on the crown of her yellow thatched head, her plump face, her rosy cheeks, big blue eyes, and the frown which drew down the corners of her red lips till they disappeared under her chin.

“Oh, dear Saint Nicholas!” she said, for she had a quaint habit of so talking to the patron saint of her people, “why do little girls have to knit and knit, when they want to be bumbling out-doors among the flowers, just like the butterflies and things?”

An outside door had opened, and a strong, handsome man strode across the clean sanded kitchen-floor to the fireplace, above which he reached, and took down from a row of hooks a gun so wonderful that he could kill a wild goose with it if the goose were half-way across the Tappan Sea; for this was Jacob Van Tassel, the most persistent and daring of all those who opposed the Tory freebooters along the Hudson, and the gun his "great goose-gun," which became so renowned in these skirmishes.

"Ask Saint Nicholas to take good care of us, too, Nochie," he said, having caught a few of her words; "there may come a time when you will be glad to be in-doors knitting."

Nochie looked up quickly. Never had she seen her father's face so pale,

nor heard his words hint so strongly of alarm.

“Wait, father,” she said; “I will go and tell mother you are going out with the great goose-gun.”

“No, no, child,” he answered; “don’t worry the mother. I shall be back as soon as I can, my butter-ball;” and brushing the back of his hand across her rosy cheek in a sort of jocose tenderness, he shouldered his gun, and hurried away to fire in ambush upon a British transport so run to ground upon the shore of that broad part of the Hudson then known as the Tappan Sea, that its stern swung landward within point-blank shot.

“Bang!” Nochie heard.

She shuddered, and dropped her knitting-needles just as her mother came into the room; then ran to her, and clung to her voluminous skirts.

“Nochie, how silly you be acting!” said her mother; “what be the matter?”

“I wish Yan were here,” Nochie cried, trembling. “Yan be never afraid.”

The mother looked above the fireplace, and saw that the great goose-gun was off the hooks! There was more “bang! bang!” and, like Nochie, she shuddered as she heard it. Peering through the small paned windows toward the east and west, she caught glimpses of other bush-fighters, many of them the young farmers of the region, hurrying up the hill to assist her husband in his attack.

“I wish Jacob were not so ready to fight these Tory boats,” she said to the Widow Van Wurmer, who had just joined them in the kitchen; “it will be the worse for him some day.”

“Oh, Jacob be one born to good

luck," responded Widow Van Wurmer, who was Nochie's aunt, and an important part of the household. "I don't blame him for fighting the rogues; I would do it myself, if I had to."

"Bang! bang! bang!" More shots were heard; and Yan, whose father kept the "King George" inn, a mile away, came running in, his eyes bright with excitement.

"Nochie, Vrouw Van Tassel!" he cried; "they've peppered that old Tory transport,—they've peppered it so good that she had no chance to fight back again, and she has to go away as fast as she can, with no chance to land a boat. That's the sort of stuff Whigs be; my father says he'll have no more King Georges on his tavern."

"Be we Whigs or Tories, mother?" Nochie asked.

"Whigs, child," the Widow Van Wurmer answered for the mother.

"And what be Whigs?"

"Those who be for our country instead of King George," her Aunt Van Wurmer still replied.

"King George?" Nochie echoed, looking across at Yan; "that's the name to be taken away from your tavern."

"Hush, Nochie!" said her mother; "children should be seen and not heard. Who's coming?" and she looked anxiously toward the back-door, as it opened, and Jacob Van Tassel entered, followed by a dozen sturdy men, all carrying guns, but none so large as the great goose-gun.

Nochie ran toward him, her face alight to see him. He stood his gun against the wall, and, catching her up, tossed her on to his broad shoulder.

“Katrina,” he called to his wife, “supper for a dozen. We have done good work, and drove the beggars off the coast, with as many holes in their craft as has your best flour-shaker. The great goose-gun never scattered a bigger lot of geese;” and he laughed heartily.

“Did n’t it miss them *once*, father?” asked Nochie, with big eyes.

“Not by a long shot,” he said, putting her down; “and near as much might be said for the others. Tell the mother we ’ll have out the best pewter plates, and some fresh olykocks for our jubilee party.”

In a moment Nochie had become a helpful little housemaid. She assisted Dinah to spread the homespun table-cloth and to lay the bright pewter plates.

“ You are to stay too, Yan, mother says, and afterwards you and I shall have the little Delft plates, with some olykocks and preserved ginger, all for ourselves.”

II.

IT was at sunrise, a week later. A severe thunder-storm during the night had lashed even the placid waters of the Tappan Sea into foam-trimmed breakers and ruffled waves, with their backs well up. Now the storm-beaten water swish-swashed upon the shore, as if it were anxious to roll farther inland, and meet Nochie and Yan, who ran toward it from the slope above.

“Oh, Yan,” said Nochie, stopping, quite out of breath, “the water be awfully wild to get to us; I believe it wants to tell us it has drownded somebody.”

“No, it does n’t,” said Yan; “it be often this way after a storm. Soon it

will all smooth out again, and show back the sky, the trees, and the rocks, like the bottom of a new tin pan."

Nochie was not paying much attention to her little friend's remark. Her big blue eyes were expanding to twice their natural size, and now she caught his hand.

"Oh, Yan, look!" she exclaimed; "the Tappan Sea *has* drownded some one, don't you see,—right over there by that big rock?"

Yan shaded his eyes with his brown hands, and looked in the direction Nochie had pointed out.

"By the good Saint Nicholas, it has!" he cried. "Come on, Nochie, let's see who it be; maybe it be one of those old Tories the great goose-gun was after the other day;" and catching her by the hand, they scampered along the

narrow strip of beach to the rock Nochie had pointed out, only stopping their run when it brought them to the supposed drowned body lying face down upon the sand.

“It be a negro!” exclaimed Nochie.

“It be n’t dead!” exclaimed Yan, in his turn. “I saw its hand move. Sheer away, Nochie, till I question who it be.”

Nochie withdrew a yard or two, while Yan asked, “Who be you?”

There was no reply.

“I say, who be you?” called Yan, giving this human piece of wreckage a poke with a stick he had picked up.

“Don’t, Yan,” cried Nochie; “you ’ll hurt it. Let me talk to it. Please, Mynheer drownded man, who be you?” and coming closer, she put her lips down almost to the man’s ear.

There was a long groan, suggestive of some one awaking from a heavy sleep; then with a stiff-jointed effort the man raised himself on one elbow, and opened his eyes.

"I be shipwrecked, little Missie," he said slowly. "Pore ole Pompey done gone an' be shipwreck nigh on to def; pore ole Pompey, to get drownded like dis!"

"Oh, he be awful drownded to talk like that!" said Yan, shrugging his shoulders.

"Not awful, but a good deal, Yan, more than you'd like to be," responded Nochie; then, with a sudden assumption of matronliness, she added, "We must take him home for some dry clothes."

"Yes, do, little Missie, please," said Pompey, now sitting erect. "Dat was bery bad storm; it broke ole Pompey's

boat, it banged ole Pompey's head, till Pompey tinked he was dead for shoar."

"For shore? I guess so," said Yan, dryly. "See if you can stand up, and Nochie and I will take you home."

"Tank you, sah," said Pompey, scrambling to his feet very actively for one so badly drowned, and shaking the water from his clothes like a big Newfoundland dog after a dive,— "tank you, sah."

A scowl crept into Yan's face; he drew Nochie one side.

"What be it?" she questioned, lowering her voice.

"He be too polite with his 'little Missies' and 'thank you, sahs,'" whispered Yan. "I mistrust he be an English lackey, sent here as a spy. Maybe we had better leave him where we find him."

“What!” Nochie exclaimed, “leave even a spy to lie in the sand like an old salmon! I’m s’prised of you, Yan.”

“But it might be dangerous to take him with us, these times,” still argued Yan.

“Well, haven’t we the great goose-gun?” asked Nochie, valiantly, “and everybody will be watching him.”

“So they will,” said Yan, his face clearing; “and what be one old man like him to all us Nederlanders?”

“That be what I think,” nodded Nochie; and as if the question were settled forever, they returned to their “drownded man.”

“You was talking ‘bout Pompey,” he said, as they came up to him; “but an ole man like Pompey ain’t no harm to no one, you need n’t be feared.”

Yan's face colored.

"Feared?" he repeated; "'deed, Nochie and I be not afeared, even of Injuns, and I can fire a gun."

"Dat's good, dat's good," affirmed Pompey, his teeth chattering as he staggered, for he was really a good deal the worse for his long swim in the rough water after it had sunk his boat with a sudden leakage.

Nochie and Yan, their qualms of distrust disappearing, took each a hand of the old man, and led him up the river-path toward their homes.

III.

POMPEY was well out of breath when the children had helped him to reach the top of the land-rise on which they lived; but his steps quickened perceptibly when his eyes were confronted by the very commodious public-house which was Yan's home.

"An' where does little Missie live?" he asked, as if he already knew that the inn was Yan's home.

Nochie waved her hand toward a comfortable early-Dutch mansion finished with crow-step gables of yellow brick, surmounted by tin weathercocks which threw back the sun so brightly in the clear morning air that one scarcely realized they were nearly a mile away.

"So far as dat?" he asked in answer to her gesture.

"There be a short cut across fields," said Yan.

"Yes, yes," he said, now fixing his eyes on Oloff Kieft, Yan's father, seated upon the long porch across the front of the inn, and smoking the typical Dutch pipe.

He was clad in very full knickerbockers, a linsey-woolsey coat decorated with large brass buttons, and a low-crowned, broad-brimmed hat was set back on his head, shading as it were his fine queue plaited with eel-skin.

As he saw Nochie and Yan approaching with Pompey so carefully in tow, he recrossed his knees, and took his long-stemmed pipe from his mouth in slow astonishment.

Yan waved his hand, to assure his

father it was all right, and called,
“Shall I bring him up, father?”

“Yes, my boy.”

“And you will not call me a cabbage
head once?”

“No.”

Yan was reassured.

“You see, Nochie,” he said, turning
to her, “I think we had better have
him; father is willing. You have Dinah,
and he would have to go near a mile
farther to your house.”

“Hurry, Yan, you whipster!” called
his father. “Hurry” was a word he
seldom used.

Nochie released Pompey’s hand.
Mynheer Kieft had advanced to his
porch railing, over which he leaned,
pipe in hand.

“The little Nochie shall come too,”
he called.

Nochie hung her head shyly; for already people were gathering upon the little street and tavern porch, to see whom the children had in hand.

“Well, Nochie Van Tassel,” laughed Yan’s father, returning to his seat on the bench, and now talking with his pipe between his lips; “you and whisper Yan have found a precious piece of driftwood after the storm.”

The children were mounting the tavern steps, and now, in a line with Pompey, seemed waiting to explain the old colored man’s presence. Shrewdly enough, Oloff Kieft had already guessed how they had come upon him.

“I think he’ll be real good and help, if you let him stay,” ventured Nochie, in behalf of the *protégé*; “perhaps he be hungry now and thirsty.”

Pompey gave her a grateful look, and the on-lookers laughed.

“Ah, to be sure,” said Oloff, “bring him a swallow or two of Hollands, till we find what he can say for himself.”

It was brought at once, and Pompey gulped it down with a finishing smack that told it had gone to the right spot.

“Now tell us who you be, where you come from, and why you be here?” Yan’s father questioned.

“I be Pompey, sah, ’thout no front or back name. I hab fished fur de last two year off Gibbet Island, when de storm drove my boat las’ night like it had to do just as it said, and wid such a spite dat it broke it all to splinters, and throwed me head fust on de Tappan shore, down dere;” and Pompey pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, so that there should be no mistake about the locality.

“You don’t belong to any Tory party who have sent you out to spy on us?”

“*No, sah,*” answered Pompey.

“And you ’ll not play us any tricks?”

“*No, sah, — no, sah.*”

“All right, then, Pompey, you may stay,” said Mynheer Kieft, waving his pipe toward him. “I need a man to work about the inn.”

Pompey’s face glistened.

“Dah be one ting I wish to say, sah,” he began modestly.

The audience were all attention.

“It be dat dare ain’t no better Whig in dis ’ere settlement dan ole Pompey; he was n’t brung from ole England to be a Englishman when he be living in America, an’ he don’t forget kindnesses.”

Yan pulled Nochie’s sleeve. “He be

a sound Whig; I be glad we brought him," he said.

"So be I," responded Nochie, in a tone of deep satisfaction.

The group about Pompey scattered as Jacob Van Tassel pushed his way among them, and laid his hand on Nochie's shoulder.

"Nochie child, go home," he said; "your mother and Dinah be searching the house from garret to cellar for you."

Nochie put her plump hand into her father's.

"Come with me, father, and tell mother and Aunt Nochie, else I shall have to knit all the afternoon,—it be no harm, be it?" she said.

"What?" he asked gruffly.

"To have brought Pompey here from the Tappan beach?"

"That be as it turns out, butterball,"

he said more gently; and taking her in his strong arms, he swung her over the porch rail to the ground below, and watched her as she ran home whispering to herself,—

“I will ask Saint Nicholas to make it no harm.”

At the gate both Nochie’s mother and her father’s sister, Nochie Van Wurmer, for whom she was named, were awaiting her, having seen her coming rapidly along the open road.

“Where have you been all this time since breakfast?” they asked at the same instant.

Nochie twisted her fingers, and retreated farther under her little round quilted cap.

“To the Tappan with Yan,” she answered. “After a storm it sometimes washes pretty things ashore, mother; and Yan and I went to look for them.”

"I warrant," said Aunt Nochie. "Well, what pretty thing did you and Yan find to pay your mother for this worry?"

A glimpse of humor flashed into Nochie's blue eyes, as she demurely replied, "A nice, old, most drownded negro named Pompey."

Both mother and aunt recoiled, while Dinah, who had caught the word "Pompey," came forward with hands upraised and rolling eyes.

"Pompey, Pompey," she muttered; "dat am a good name,—de best, next to Dinah, dat we colored peoples have."

"Tell us the rest, child," said Nochie's aunt, impatiently; "what became of him?"

"Why, Yan and I brought him up the steep bank home, and now he be at the King George, talking with Myn-

heer Oloffie Kieft, who told him he might stay there."

"Oloffie Kieft should be more cautious these times," said Widow Van Wurmer, shortly.

"And children too," said Vrouw Van Tassel, taking Nochie's hand with a firm grip.

"Why, mother," said Nochie, looking up into her mother's face, "he be a Whig all sound enough, 'cause he was telling Mynheer Oloffie Kieft and Yan, after he had had the Hollands, that he would soon have the King George sign down for them, for he be awful tall to reach, taller than father, and most as strong, I guess, when he be n't drownded."

The Widow Van Wurmer shook her head, but Vrouw Van Tassel's face cleared and softened, and she

said, "Come, Nochie, there be a bowl of bread and milk and cheese waiting for you in the kitchen."

"And shall I have to knit fifty rounds?" Nochie asked, holding to her mother.

"Thirty will do," she answered, conscious that Widow Van Wurmer's eyes were fixed upon her to see that justice was done, "if you will promise never again to go to the edge of the Tappan Sea without asking me?"

"Not even with Yan?" questioned Nochie, as they went into the kitchen.

"No, not even with Yan."

"Nor father?"

"Well, yes, with father, if he has his great goose-gun with him."

Nochie drowned a sigh in a big spoonful of bread and milk and cheese.

IV.

TWO weeks after this, and while the good Netherlanders were still talking of the routing they had given the English transport, Jacob Van Tassel did not come home, neither did his great goose-gun. Affairs had gone on very smoothly till to-day, and not a piece of foreign craft of any description had been seen upon the waters of their beloved Tappan Sea. Now, after a long day of wondering where the father was, Vrouw Van Tassel, Widow Van Wurmer, and Nochie sat down to the supper-table without him.

Vrouw Van Tassel had adopted a frugal table custom which greatly entertained Nochie. Suspended from the

rafters above the table was a large lump of sugar, which was swung from mouth to mouth as it was needed to sweeten the very good tea served from a dignified Delft teapot by Vrouw Van Tassel.

Nochie had just set the sugar lump to swinging in a line with her aunt's chin, when Oloff Kieft opened the back door with no preliminary knock, and walked in, his pipe between his lips as usual, though no smoke came from it, and a deep scowl was caught between his bushy eyebrows. At a respectful distance followed Yan.

“Be Jacob here, Vrouw Van Tassel?” Oloff asked.

Vrouw Van Tassel looked up from her pewter plate more surprised at the sudden presence of the questioner than at his question. Never before had she known Oloff Kieft to go so far from his tavern bench.

“Jacob here? No, good neighbor,” she said, “but we look for him every moment.”

“Did he take the great goose-gun?” he asked, the scowl becoming an anxious frown.

“That he did,” answered Widow Van Wurmer; “he always does if he be going any distance into the wood.”

“Saint Nicholas pity us, then,” Oloff said slowly. “Pompey has gone too; it be a bad look-out for us.”

Vrouw Van Tassel dropped her knife and fork with a clatter. “Oloff Kieft,” she cried, “you don’t mean anything has happened Jacob Van Tassel?”

“No, no, not for sure,” he said, while Nochie, with a pale, scared face, left the table and went nearer Yan; “but I thought it neighborly to tell you, in case he does not come back, to keep well locked up. There are some

whipper-snapper Tories hanging about the bush, and making free with such beef and bacon as they can find on four legs. There be something said, too, about a big Tory craft being seen on the Tappan Sea that be headed this way. It be well to look out. Send over to us if you need anything ; ” and with a long draw upon his pipe, — which now began to smoke as usual, its owner having accomplished his errand, — he turned about and stalked slowly out.

Nochie began to cry.

“ Never mind, Nochie,” said Yan, stepping nearer her ; “ I ’ll stay, and if you ’ll lend me a gun, I ’ll fight, and fight for you, till your father comes.”

“ I know you will, Yan,” she answered, wiping her eyes ; “ but it be because father does n’t come that I be so

worried. What if he should never come?"

Yan looked very grave.

"I wish we had had nothing to do with that old Pompey," he said; "it makes me feel as if I had helped your father to be kidnapped away."

"Oh, Yan," said Nochie, with a choking sound in her voice, "he be n't kidnapped, a big man like him with the great goose-gun! Don't say that."

"I won't, Nochie," replied Yan, manfully; "but if anything like that has happened to him, Nochie, I'll try my best to find him; I ought to."

"So ought I," said Nochie, grievingly, "'cause it was both of us, Yan."

Dinah stood near, wringing her hands; while Widow Van Wurmer and Vrouw Van Tassel, withdrawn to the big chimney-corner, held a council of war.

“I know what we can do,” said Nochie, her eyes brightening; “we’ll go and ask the good Saint Nicholas to keep father from harm. Every Christmas when I ask him for things, he brings them,—a great big doll, some tulip bulbs, a little spinning-wheel just like mother’s, and a ring. Come, Yan.”

Yan shook his head. “I tell you, Nochie,” he said, “you go, while I run home cross-cuts, and get my own gun; then I’ll come back as soon as ever I can, and bring you the last news. Good-by;” and he sped out of the door like a streak.

In the parlor—that room of state, opened only for funerals, marriages, the Festival of Saint Nicholas, and a weekly resanding and dusting—was kept the Saint Nicholas which Nochie

had referred to. He stood upon the mantel, a bright metal image not more than a foot high, and burnished till he outshone the weathercocks. On either side of him was a plaster cat; its back, face, and tail spotted with red and green paint.

With Yan's disappearance, Nochie turned toward the parlor. Almost from force of habit, she took off her shoes and entered the room in her stocking feet, using the utmost precaution not to disturb the complicated curves and angles laid out in the sand upon the floor.

Not stopping now to admire the beautiful cats as she had always done before, she reached up on tiptoe to Saint Nicholas, and whispered in deepest confidence: "Dear Saint Nicholas, you be always so good to me; don't let



“DEAR SAINT NICHOLAS, YOU BE ALWAYS SO GOOD
TO ME!”

anything happen to my father, but bring him home all safe, please, please do, and I will knit twice as many rows every day, and help mother to spin, and not get saucy to Aunt Nochie, but be very good all day long."

A few tears dripped on Saint Nicholas's feet, and ran over the knuckles of the plump soft fingers with which Nochie held to the mantel.

"Mercy sakes! where be that child now?" she heard some one say. It was the Widow Van Wurmer's voice.

Nochie started, and hastened from the mantel and the room, closing the door without a jar.

"Nochie, Nochie," called her mother, anxiously, "come to me." Then, as Nochie appeared, she cried, "Why be your shoes off?"

Nochie's eyes drooped. "I will put them right on," she said.

In the mean time the energetic Widow Van Wurmer bustled about, putting the whole available household into a state of defence, which was the result of the council of war. The piece of "ordnance" they had most depended upon in case of attack was the great goose-gun. This being gone with its owner, she fitted out Dinah, a couple of stable boys, Vrouw Van Tassel, and herself with kettles, sauce-pans, tongs, brooms, and staves, and sent them so armed, one by one, to the upper story of the mansion, where Jacob Van Tassel had opened loopholes for just such an emergency.

And the emergency grew more pressing, for through the upper windows they could descry in the evening dusk that

the Tory craft was riding at anchor on the shore of the Tappan Sea, while its crew, with shout and laughter, were making their way up the land-rise toward the Van Tassel Homestead, or "Roost," as the mansion was called.

V.

AT this moment the back door rattled, and to the call, "Let me in," Widow Van Wurmer opened it to admit Yan, panting for breath, his little gun on his shoulder.

The Widow Van Wurmer was clearly surprised to see Yan again.

"Are they willing you should come?" she asked; "it be dangerous here."

"That be why I told Nochie I would come," he said with bright eyes; "where be she?"

"You had better see for yourself, then scamper home to your father as fast as you can." Yan's mother was dead.

"Will you all come with me?" he said. "Father said you should all come."

"Yan Onderdonck Kieft!" exclaimed the Widow Van Wurmer, "there be not a Van Tassel that will leave this roof till it be burned over them;" and she began piling chairs and pushing tables against the door he had just entered.

In spite of the seriousness of the occasion, Yan giggled at her preparations for barring out the enemy.

"Be you going?" she cried, drawing back a chair to make room for his exit, and stamping her foot.

"Not I," he answered.

"Very well, stay then," she said; then added in a softer tone, as Yan helped her push the last table against the door, "Nochie be in the garret; take your gun and go to her."

Already there was a thumping and pounding against the doors and windows and walls of the house, with a few wild whoops and a shot or two.

“It be time for you to come too,” Yan said to Widow Van Wurmer; but she waved him ahead. Looking back, he saw that she followed him with a martial step and no show of fear.

In the garret Yan set himself to guard one loop-hole, while the stable-boys took three others, and Vrouw Van Tassel, Dinah, and Nochie tried to do justice to the others, subject to the strict orders of Widow Van Wurmer.

“It be no wonder Jacob said she was equal to the stoutest-hearted man in the country,” Vrouw Van Tassel thought, as she watched the valiant widow; “this seems to be her *forte*.”

The pounding below grew more vigorous and persistent. Something gave way with a crash. The widow peeped through her loop-hole, and flung a flat-iron upon the heads of the front-door assailants.

“Yan, fire your gun,” she cried; “Katrina, the best pot and kettle; you boys there, the bricks, the brooms, the everything you can lay your hands on; Dinah, the kettle of tar,—turn it slowly, aim it well.”

At the same time she flung shovel, tongs, and an open bag of saltpetre from *her* loop-hole, so that the enemy, who had now completely surrounded the house, were assaulted from above with a “rain” of terror.

There was a moment’s silence; then the hooting, mingled with a groan or two, was renewed, with the smashing in

of doors and windows, and a cry of fire.

Yan peered out.

“Yes, we must go, Nochie, right away,” he said; “they have set fire to us.”

“To be sure!” cried Widow Van Wurmer, “the varlets could think of nothing braver to do. Come, Katrina, Nochie, Yan, everybody,—come before we are smoked out like wasps.”

In an instant they were all below stairs, groping their way toward escape, amid blinding smoke and roaring flame.

“S-hush, s-hush!” said the Widow Van Wurmer; “we will go out the little side door, hidden by the grape-trellis. Ah! there is a shout; some one is coming to help us. Now wait here a moment;” and she marshalled her retreating forces to the dense grape-grown trellis, while the

crackling and banging and shouting went on about them.

Nochie caught Yan's hand. "Oh, Yan, there be the good Saint Nicholas; we must not leave him to burn, or he will not help us to find father!" and she darted into the house, along the hallway, to the parlor door, which the assailants had left wide open, after ransacking every corner of the room. Without stopping to take off shoes this time, she rushed in and picked up the metal Saint Nicholas from the floor, where he had evidently been dropped, in the pillager's hot haste.

"Poor, poor Saint Nicholas!" she cried, rushing out again, to meet Yan in the hallway, trying to follow her.

"I have it, Yan, the good Saint Nicholas! Here, you take it,—it will be safer;" and she put it in his hands just

as there was a falling in of timber and a cloud of plaster-dust all about them.

The next thing that Nochie realized was that with her mother, Aunt Nochie, and Dinah, she was watching the flames eat the last fragment of her home, while in the beautiful red glow it cast upon the Tappan Sea the freebooters were seen already putting off from shore, as if satisfied that their dreadful work was well done. Their parting hoots and hurrahs rang hard against the hills.

And Yan,—Yan had as totally disappeared as either Jacob Van Tassel or Pompey.

VI.

GIBBET ISLAND, as all New Nederlanders know, is within easy reach of the mirror-like Tappan Sea. Its coast abounds in high rocks, that threaten dangerous landing to any but the initiated, who at this time were freebooters, water-pirates, and that rough, roistering set of men whom the settlers much more willingly classed as Tories than as Whigs.

Yan, suddenly gathered up in the arms of a stranger, wriggled like a flounder; called for help, though unheard in the crashing timber and crushing plaster; then resigned himself to a fate which pushed his hat farther over his eyes, scrambled with him down the

cow-path to the edge of the Tappan Sea, and stowed him away in the hold of a bulky transport that made toward Gibbet Island with him, just as a farmer who had twice shot his gun in the Van Tassel defence stole up to Nochie's mother, as she turned again and again, loath to leave.

“Be anything wanted, Vrouw?” he asked kindly.

“Be anything wanted?” she repeated, like one adream; “everything be wanted, — a husband, a home, and Yan — where be Yan?”

“Yan be most like on the cross cut home, to tell Oloff you are coming,” answered the man, unsuspiciously.

“It would be all a piece with the rest if we never see him again,” said the Widow Van Wurmer, who now that the life and death emergency was over,

descended from her heroic plain of family defender, and seemed as depressed and saddened as the rest.

“Who wants a little lad like him?” said the farmer; while Nochie cried: “Of course he has gone straight home. He was here when I went to get the Saint Nicholas; and of course he has gone right home with it, so it will be safe.”

“Blessed be it!” cried Dinah. “Dat de chile has gone done sabed de good ole Saint Nicholas; dat mean some good, anyhows!”

The farmer went with them until the tavern came in sight, very dark and not a little afraid of freebooters on its own behalf. No one there could tell a word of Yan.

In the mean time Yan, well enough versed in local geography to suspect

where he was going, was already hatching a plan for his escape from the lonely island. "I will dive and swim from the island to the other shore," he said to himself; "in the dark it will be easy."

At this instant the craft came to port with a tremendous thud; and with boxes, bales, and bundles of cargo, Yan was left upon the island, in charge of a bluff sailor, who pretended to speak neither English nor Hollandish, and in perfect silence kept so shrewd a watch upon Yan that there was no chance of his getting away.

How glad, then, was he, about sunrise and after the weary sleepless night, to see a boat, quite large and pretentious, coming toward them.

Soon it ran alongside the island; and the glum sailor, helping to load it with the captured cargo, neglected his guard

of Yan, and gave him the opportunity to dive and try to swim to safety.

Standing near a crate of cackling chickens, Yan buttoned his jacket over the metal Saint Nicholas, preparatory to the run and plunge, when this little act brought a new idea to him. What better chance could he have for finding Nochie's father than to go peacefully with his captors? He would not try to escape.

This resolution taken, he helped to lift a box or two aboat, and, leaning against the taffrail as they sailed rapidly away, he observed everything around him with increasing interest.

“Well, my lad,” said an officer in full English uniform, coming up to him, and taking a seat, “for a son of Oloff Kieft, and friend to the Van Tassels, you seem wonderfully willing to go

along with a Tory turn-out; or perhaps you feared Gibbet Island?"

Yan scanned the officer's face, and saw a twinkle in his eye.

"P'r'aps I was feared of it," said Yan dryly, —

“‘For three merry lads be we,
And three merry lads be we
I on the land, and thou on the sand,
And Jack on the gallows-tree.’”

“Ah, yes!” said the officer, stroking his mustache, for he knew that Yan was quoting the song of the three Tory freebooters hung on Gibbet Island, “and what about witches?”

“We don't have them much hereabouts, not as they tell of having them over at Salem,” Yan answered honestly; “there be charms and good Saint Nicholas to keep them off.”

“Oh, to be sure,” laughed the officer,

“ Saint Nicholas *is* worth a great deal. In my country we have Saint George.”

“ That be England ? ” questioned Yan, who had been studying out the officer’s uniform.

“ Yes,” said the officer.

“ Is that where we be going ? ”

“ No,” was the answer ; “ we’re headed for New Amsterdam, as you Nederlanders like to say, — to New York we call it.”

Yan’s eyes brightened in spite of his circumstances. For a moment he forgot he was a prisoner, with this handsome officer talking so freely to him, and he remembered only how much he had always wanted to see the wonderful city he had heard so much of.

Suddenly his eyes clouded.

“ What will you do with me there ? ” he asked soberly.

"Make you useful," the officer responded. "Can you run errands?"

"Try me," answered Yan.

"Without running away, I mean," said the officer.

"I never ran away in my life," answered Yan, sturdily.

"Not from the enemy?" the officer asked.

Again Yan looked up into the officer's face, this time to see he was quizzing him. He flushed, and changed the subject.

"Be there many negro people in New York?"

"Yes, plenty," answered the officer.

"Be any of them named Pompey?"

The officer looked at Yan keenly, and read his thought.

"You had better let well enough alone, my lad," he said; "it will take

more than you or your friends, young galligaskins, to find Pompey or rescue Jacob Van Tassel;" and he rose from his seat and walked away.

"Will it?" thought Yan.

VII.

IF Yan could have communicated in some way with his friends, and thus let them know of his safety, he would at first have been quite happy in New York, so alert and bustling was it with the coming and going of jolly soldiery, and so astir with colonial life and spirit.

As it was, he filled the position of page to the handsome officer who had talked with him upon the boat, and was comfortably housed and fed.

Once or twice there had been a strong temptation to escape; but he lingered on, hoping to hear something that would guide him in his watch for Jacob Van Tassel and Pompey. But the situation

became wearing and irksome; he grew weary of feeling that he was under a system of espionage, however unobtrusive it seemed to be; and when he overheard a talk of sending him out of the country, he lay awake at night with visions of his Dutch home and Nochie in his mind. He had, too, a new feeling of sympathy for Jacob Van Tassel, whose circumstances were like, yet might be very much worse than, his own; and he nodded across in the dark to Saint Nicholas, who stood unharmed on a little shelf in his room, as if he were saying, "You and I, good Saint Nicholas, must look out more sharply for ourselves, and not forget we be sworn to find Jacob Van Tassel if we can."

The next morning, as it happened, the officer called Yan to him with a serious expression upon his face.

“Yan,” he said, “how long have you been with me?”

“Sixteen months,” Yan promptly answered; for he had carefully counted it over in the night.

“Ahem!” said the officer, clearing his throat. “You are sure of it?”

“Yes, sir, I be,” responded Yan. “I was taken July twenty-seventh, seventeen hundred and seventy-five; from that to last July would be a twelvemonth, and from the twelvemonth till now, November twenty-eight, seventeen hundred and seventy-six, makes it sixteen months as I count. I was fourteen then, now I be fifteen;” and his face sobered.

“Well,” continued the officer, “when one has found a boy trusty and honorable for sixteen consecutive months, one can go a little farther with him, don’t you think so?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Yan, a little dubious as to what all this was leading to.

“Then right about face, my lad; here is a note that must be taken to Captain Pointer, frigate ‘Vulcan,’ at the docks. I give you one hour to go in, two to get back in; it is now nine o’clock, at twelve report with the answer.”

“Yes, sir,” replied Yan, delighted with a commission that was to take him beyond his usual limit; “be Sam or Willets to go along?”

“Neither,” said the officer; “I shall trust you alone. Be sure and remember Captain Pointer’s exact reply. It will be in words, and not written. And, Yan,” he continued, a peculiar expression settling on his face.

“Yes, sir,” said Yan.

“In case you are captured and

searched, you know what to do with the note, don't you? ”

Yan looked at the officer with a twinkle in his eyes, and made his full set of perfect teeth move up and down.

The officer nodded, while Yan's face suddenly became extremely grave.

“ I be a Whig, be n't I? ” he asked.

The officer nodded again.

“ What kind of a Whig would I be to eat a Tory note that might help the Whigs if they were to get it from me? ”

“ A poor one, ” answered the officer. “ I see what you are after, Yan; ” and going to a desk, he rewrote his note in such obscure language that it was worthless to any one but he to whom it was sent.

“ Now we're all right; be off with you, Yan, and back by twelve, — do you *mind*, my lad? ”

“ If I be alive, sir ; ” and Yan, guardless for once, and light-hearted, was already on his way.

Had even Yan’s father met him on the street that morning, he would scarcely have known him ; for instead of a short plump boy in full knicker-bockers, and a jacket trimmed with bright metal buttons exactly like Oloff’s own, he wore a trim, close-fitting suit of Continental blue, gilt knee-buckles which showed just a trifle above his top-boots, and a cocked hat that was set quite jauntily above his queue, instead of the broad-brimmed head-cover of a year ago, while in figure he had become tall and slight.

Getting nearer the water, he took in long breaths of the salt air, swung his arms to and fro in a sort of abandon to this comparative freedom, then

hastened on,—for there was no time to lose,—while many turned to see where this fine-looking lad was going at such a rapid rate.

He had reached the region now where buildings were very scattered, and indeed had simmered down to a few lonely cabins along the edge of the salt marsh, when the door of the most wretched of these cabins opened, and in the doorway stood tall, lank, stoop-shouldered Pompey. There was no mistaking him.

He held his hand above his eyes as if looking for some one, and for an instant fixed his glance upon Yan; then, dropping his hand like one disappointed, went in and slammed the door.

For a moment Yan's heart beat so fast he could not move. Recovering

from this, his next impulse was to rush to the cabin and demand of Pompey where Jacob Van Tassel was hidden. Then he stopped to consider. He was a captive held by his word to do a commission by a certain time. Evidently Pompey had not recognized him. He would probably be there, if he were to come back that afternoon or the next day.

“To-morrow morning I shall come,” said Yan, conclusively, and with a jump that took him six feet nearer his destination; “for I will be free, I *must* be free, or my name is not Yan Onderdonck Kieft!”

The whiffs of sea-air, sharpened to needle-points by keen November, were bracing his spirits like wine; he ran, he galloped, he sprang, he could not seem to contrive a motion that would

take him to his destination fast enough.

While it yet wanted a quarter of ten, hat in hand, he put the note into Captain Pointer's fingers.

"You are warm, my lad; and no wonder, for you have made good time. Can you do as well in taking the answer?"

Yan's face fell, for he had planned a little détour on his way back, which would allow him a more critical inspection of Pompey's cabin, and yet let him reach "home" by twelve.

He threw back his shoulders, and looked Captain Pointer squarely in the face. "I'll try to, sir," was his answer.

"That's right," said the captain; and taking Yan one side, he repeated to him a formula of words on which the fate

of a nation might (or might not) depend, yet to the messenger was as meaningless as Egyptian hieroglyphics.

“I don’t like this, I don’t like this,” said Yan, turning about; “it be poor business for a Whig. What did I give my word for? Well, here I go for the last time;” and breaking into a dog trot, with his arms set akimbo, he ran with unbroken speed till he reached his officer’s headquarters, not even slackening his gait when he passed near Pompey’s cabin.

“Here, my young Whigster,” said the officer, who had been restlessly pacing up and down the room, and not now looking overjoyed to see Yan so soon back. “You shall have that for your promptness;” and he flung Yan a coin. “What is your message?”

Yan was puzzled. The officer’s looks

belied his words. The boy made no offer to pick up the money.

“I have it,” said Yan; “but what’ll be the cost if I keep it?”

“The cost?” repeated the officer.

“Yes; that be—I mean,” explained Yan, fingering his hat nervously, “that if it be anything to bring harm to the—our Whigs, sir, I will keep it. I didn’t think so much about this at first, sir.”

“You may be shot, put to death, if you don’t tell me,” said the officer.

Yan’s face, red and flushed from his rapid run, turned white, but he said nothing.

“Yan,” said the officer, veering about suddenly in his walk up and down the room, which he had resumed, “take my word for it, there’s not a syllable in the message that can harm a colonist now or ever.”

The color came back to Yan's face. "Thank you, sir," he said; and he repeated to him the formula of words, which the officer listened to indifferently.

Yan stooped and picked up the coin, then took the officer's extended right hand.

"You are glad of the coin, Yan?" he asked.

"I have not seen so much money since—" and a mist came over the boy's eyes.

"Since when?" asked the officer.

"Since I was home," finished Yan, with an effort.

"Ah!" was the officer's only observation, as he with seeming abstraction opened a book.

In the morning when Yan was called, he was not there. The officer was told. His start denoted surprise. Yesterday

was the day he had thought of Yan's escaping.

"So he has taken his chance at last," he said to himself; "my lads would have tried it long before;" and he fell to thinking of his sturdy boys in England. To do him justice, it may be said that he had no idea of Pompey's whereabouts at this time; but he foresaw a "Tory" retreat in which Yan were far better at home.

VIII.

YAN, free, was a night-wanderer.

The streets were dark, and lavishly glazed with a sleet that came down like glass beads, and like glass beads glimmered and glittered wherever pale strips of candle or whale-oil light reached out into the night from the little windows of some late-hour resort.

Yan buttoned the metal Saint Nicholas snugly under his jacket, and slipped and slid on his way, sometimes feeling as if he were treading a maze, so perversely did the streets, "evoluted" from cow-paths, seem to twist and turn in the deep darkness.

“ If Nochie were here, she would say, ‘ Good Saint Nicholas, give me night eyes, that I may see where I be going;’ now haste be waste;” and he took shelter under a buttonwood-tree till at four o’clock a little light would be thrown on his search for the most retired way of reaching Pompey’s cabin.

He gave no thought of how to approach the old vagrant, nor of danger to himself when by six o’clock he rattled the door-latch, pushed against the door, and called, “ Let me in.”

There was a shuffling inside, and a call of, “ What be wanted ? ”

“ Open the door and see,” was Yan’s response.

“ Friend or foe ? ” called the old man.

Yan considered his reply. Something in the old man’s tremulous tones, as well

as his wretched cabin and surroundings, told Yan he had a poverty-stricken customer to deal with. His fingers twirled the officer's coin in his pocket.

"Some one with money for you," answered Yan.

"Heben be tanked!" cried the old man, "for I be near starbed waiting. I taut you'd neber come;" and he fumbled at the bolt with hands that shook as he drew it with a rusty creak.

Yan stepped in, and Pompey stepped back.

"Lordy Massy!" he cried, "you be n't de one I taut you was. Who be you?"

"I be Yan Kieft, and I want you to tell me where Jacob Van Tassel be?"

The old darkey sat down on his bed,

shaking his head disconsolately. "Done forget all 'bout it," he said.

"No, you have n't," said Yan. "Think hard and talk fast; time be precious."

"No, no, no," mumbled the old man.

"Then I'll call the Continental Congress and have you arrested," persisted Yan.

"Dat'll be no harm," said the old man, captiously. "One feels most like turning Whig, anyways, when de Tories treats you like a ole wore-out pair ob shoes."

"They kicked you off?" asked Yan.

"Ay, an' worser, dey hab lef me wid-out eben a pipe or a timble of 'baccy to put in it. Yore fader was kinder dan dat; he allus 'lowed ole Pompey a good smoke ebry day."

"I'll do better than that," said Yan.
"Tell me where to find Jacob Van

Tassel, and I 'll give you a gold piece that 'll buy you 'baccy for a year's smoking, twice a day ; " and he held up the coin between his thumb and finger.

Pompey's dull eyes shone like the gleam of the gold.

" I don't know, young Massa, 'bout him now," he said ; " but as true as libing and breving, de night I 'scorted him to dis 'ere city, he war put aboard a ship for Boston, where de Tories was pooty strong."

" Do you think he be there now ? " Yan asked eagerly.

" Don't know nuffun more 'bout it, sah ; but de English dey hab n't had so much to do wiv Boston sence last March."

" That be so," said Yan, knitting his brows ; " do you think he be here in New York ? "

" No, sah ! no, sah," said Pompey, so

precipitately that Yan, rising, looked at him sharply.

“Where’s de money?” asked Pompey.

“You have n’t earned it,” Yan answered, dropping it into his pocket as he moved toward the door.

Pompey raised his eyes to the bare loft, rolling them piously from corner to corner.

“What a pusson don’t know, dat he can’t tell; but dare be good fishing in Canady.”

“Which place?” asked Yan, quickly.
“Montreal?”

Pompey made no sign.

“Quebec?”

Pompey’s eyes closed and opened; and he put out his hand, which opened and closed as Yan dropped the coin into it and, hastening away, disappeared in the direction of the wharf.

“Yan be bright,” said the old man, “but he’ll hab to be as bright as de sun an’ moon an’ stars tuggeder, to find Jacob Van Tassel in Canady;” and he laughed as he pocketed the coin.

IX.

YAN knew it would not do for him to hang about the wharf. A vessel flying an English pennant looked just ready for sea. He ran aboard, and asked the captain where she was going.

“Canada,” said the captain, shortly, “if we can get there; and I never have known her to miss a trip yet.”

Yan’s heart leaped.

“I’ll go along,” he said.

“We don’t take passengers,” said the captain, “not without special permits.”

“I’ll work my way,” said Yan.

“You look like it,” said the captain. “I’ve tried your kind before; they put

on gloves, so to speak, when they went to handle the ropes ; ” and he shrugged his shoulders.

“ That be n’t my kind,” responded Yan, coloring.

“ Then what kind be you ? ” asked the captain, turning one side to give an order about lifting a heavy box.

“ I be this kind,” answered Yan ; and springing forward, he helped the sailor to lift the box to its place.

“ All right, then,” said the captain ; “ if that be your stamp, we ’ll let you earn your passage, but there be not a cent to boot.”

“ I don’t mind, if you ’ll throw in a little food.”

The captain raised his eyebrows.

“ You be hungry ? ” he asked ; “ coil that rope, and there ’ll be a call to mess soon.”

Under full sail, and a good breakfast eaten, Yan had a few moments to himself, in which he more carefully weighed Pompey's information that he recalled with slight mistrust.

"Boys be blunderers, as father says," he reflected. "Now I be pulling off from shore at this rate I can see I had better have tried to reach home, and got help for Jacob Van Tassel there; but then there is Nochie with her faith in Saint Nicholases;" and a little comforted, he answered the captain's call to him.

Two hours out, and their vessel ran alongside a prison ship riding at anchor.

Yan noticed it closely. It was the first time he had seen a jail afloat.

"Any one new on board?" called the captain of the vessel to the prison ship.

"No, no," replied the prison-ship war-

den ; " no one newer than our old stand-by, Van Tassel."

" How be he ? " the captain of the vessel asked, while Yan listened in keen-eared interest, his heart in his throat.

" Quiet," was the answer ; " but as good for fighting as his great goose-gun, if he has a chance. Who is that boy you have aboard in all that fine toggery ? "

" A lad working his way to Canada ? " was the response.

" Canada, I vow," cried the warden ; " what 's his name ? "

The captain turned toward Yan, who had drawn back.

" What be your name, lad ? " he questioned.

" Yan Onderdonck Kieft," he replied, beginning to see his way clearer.

“ You have been with General Clifton, and be getting away from him ? ” the prison warden demanded.

“ Yes, sir,” Yan said.

“ Out of the frying-pan into the fire, then, you young freebooter ! Tie him and send him to us, Captain Atcomb ; he belongs here.”

“ To be sure,” said Captain Atcomb ; and Yan, offering no resistance, was quickly transferred to the deck of the prison ship, and led below deck to a little cell scarcely large enough for one.

X.

BECAUSE Yan showed no disposition to be unruly, but passively accepted his fate, he was soon released from rigid imprisonment, and set to making himself useful about the ship.

One day, after being two weeks aboard, he was sent to serve food to the other prisoners. This was what he of all things wished, as it would give him his first chance, and the best chance, to see Jacob Van Tassel.

Nochie's father sat by himself in a dark corner of the hold, more strongly manacled than the others, and he did not even glance up as Yan came to him with a plate of stale food in his hand.

Yan dropped a crust of bread, and stooped to pick it up. Still Jacob did not look up. In an instant Yan had drawn Saint Nicholas from under his jacket, and set it boldly upon the table beside Jacob.

This time raising his head, Jacob started, and put out his hand toward the well-known Saint Nicholas ; then quickly withdrew it, and scanned Yan closely.

Yan saw that he was not yet completely recognized. "Nochie," he said, in the lowest voice, not daring to use his own name.

"Yan?" Jacob whispered, with a keen glance.

"What be that on the table?" one of the guard asked at this moment.

"Only Saint Nicholas," answered Yan.

“That be like a boy,” laughed the guard; “no sooner does December fairly come in than his mind must be running on Saint Nicholas,—as if we hang up stockings on prison ships. Bring it here, lad; where did you get it?”

Yan put it in the guard’s hand, who examined it closely, without answering.

“Not a bad piece of work; but what do you do with it?”

“I can make it tell stories,” said Yan; and no one but himself knew how long he had thought upon the special story he wanted it to tell.

“Show us how,” said the guard, putting it back into Yan’s hand.

“This way,” answered Yan, not allowing himself to hesitate, and pushing the table nearer the centre of the hold, as if he wished that all might see. “Here be two friends;” and he held a narrow

bread-crust beside Saint Nicholas, to represent the other friend. "They wish to take a journey together," and here Yan looked casually toward Jacob Van Tassel, "when a dog comes in and almost gobbles the crust-friend up; then the Saint Nicolas friend says, 'He will not eat me, I be metal; that be not the kind of stuff he likes to eat,' and he whisks his crust-friend under his coat, *so*;" and Yan tucked the crust under the arm of the metal cloak which fell from Saint Nicholas's shoulder, "and jumps with him into the air;" and Yan walked Saint Nicholas across the table with awkward strides, and jumped him into space, with a gesture that suggested Saint Nicholas plunging with his crust-friend into *water*.

The prisoners, disposed to be entertained by any slight diversion, laughed;

while Yan, anxious, glanced toward Jacob Van Tassel's corner.

Jacob had understood; he raised a manacled wrist, and let it fall.

Ah, the manacle! Here was another difficulty. Yan, pondering it, gathered up the prisoners' plates, and went out, in his abstraction leaving Saint Nicholas forgotten on the table.

XI.

IT was a week after this that the prison ship which had been hugging the shore, for the last ten days, rode up to the wharf, and was secured there.

Yan, always on the lookout, saw Pompey fishing on the docks below; and though it was the twenty-second of December, snowy and cold, he had seemingly brought up two or three fishes of very creditable appearance. The captain had also seen the old colored man and his fish. Indeed, Pompey was waving them toward the prison ship, as if he particularly wished it, and no other craft, to see his catch.

“Yan,” said the captain, “you see that old curmudgeon with his fish; give him this for them,” he handed Yan a little piece of money, “and bring them up to me.”

“Yes, sir,” said Yan, springing across the gang-plank, which had just been placed for some sailors to go ashore.

“Pompey, you are as much a villain as ever,” the boy gasped; “just wait till we get you in Sleepy Hollow! Even your fish are stale, and of a month’s ago freezing.”

“Nochie be here,” said Pompey, stoically. “I sawed her at the Van Wurmers’.”

“Nochie!” exclaimed Yan; “but how can I believe that? It be like your saying Jacob Van Tassel was in Canada when he be here.”

“I neber sayed so,—no, sah.”

“What did I give you that money for, then?” and Yan looked at Pompey’s well-filled pipe.

“For ‘baccy, sah.”

Yan raised his fist, then let it drop to his side.

“Sorry to be dispinting, sah; shall I take a message to Nochie?”

The captain whistled for Yan’s return.

Yan, starting to go back to the ship, shook his head.

“I be in earnest dis time,” Pompey said.

“Then get me a file, Pompey.”

“Pompey be pore, he hab no money to buy a file;” and he glanced pointedly at the coin in Yan’s hand.

Yan again shook his head. “That be the captain’s,” he said.

“Here, Yan,” called the captain.

"Yes, sir," answered Yan, turning.

Pompey stepped nearer him. "I tell Nochie 'bout de file; 'morrow morning watch out."

Yan made no sign of hearing him, though his eye brightened for an instant. Not once, since his first visit to the prisoner's "hold," had he been able to see Jacob Van Tassel, nor could he find a file, nor anything that could be used as a file, in any corner of the ship. One English craft after another, weighted with the feeling that their side of the cause was losing ground, was clearing the New York harbor for safer water. "Then where shall Jacob Van Tassel and Yan be," he had asked himself, more depressed than ever before, "when the prison ship is ordered to leave?" Now, if there were still a chance! but he doubted it.

“Well, slow-coach, where are the fish?” asked the Captain.

Yan laughed, in spite of his sombre mood. “Those be only some thawed out fish he was going to take us in by,—caught last fall, I expect. I would n’t buy them,” he answered, as he put the coin into the captain’s hand.

“So that was what kept you so long; all right, you and I can wait a little longer for our fried fish,” and he clapped Yan on his shoulder, “rather than be taken in.”

The following morning, in spite of his want of faith in anything that Pompey might say, Yan leaned over the ship-railing observing closely the motley going and coming of people of all kinds and stations. Soldiers and sailors predominated, with a few women, here and there, buying or selling fruit — oranges,

lemons, and apples — from the covered stalls along the dock.

Among them Yan noticed a little Dutch girl purchasing oranges, and looking shyly toward the prison ship. She was attended by a colored woman. Eureka! it was Dinah; and the little Dutchess, Nochie! Yan sprang back from the rail as if he had been shot, and, like a shot, was across the gang-plank and close to Nochie's side.

“Nochie, oh, Nochie!” he whispered; “we be safe, your father and I, but prisoners. Help us to escape.”

Nochie, with more discretion than Yan, kept her eyes now fixed on the fruit-woman; at the same time she pressed into Yan's hand a file.

“That be what I came for,” she said. “Pompey told me about the file. Now go; they are coming for you;” and she

took the oranges and turned away, as two brawny sailors seized Yan by the shoulders, and walked him back to the prison ship in great haste.

“ You be a greenhorn to think you can get away that easy,” said the captain to Yan, with a half-laugh in his eye.

“ I was n’t trying to get away,” said Yan.

“ Likely not,” said the captain, suspiciously; “ but after this you may stay below deck with the other prisoners.”

“ Yes, sir,” said Yan, meekly. He had nearly said, “ Thank you, sir,” — so glad was he to receive this order.

XII.

IN the hold among the other prisoners, Yan was allowed to move about, but not to exchange a word, nor go near any one of them.

He walked directly to the table, and, picking up the Saint Nicholas still standing there, began playing with it restlessly, casting a furtive glance now and then at Jacob Van Tassel, who he saw was as furtively watching him.

Yan was asking himself how he was to get the file to Nochie's father, when, in turning the image, he discovered that it was hollow.

With a quick glance toward Jacob Van Tassel, and a sign which fastened his attention upon the Saint Nicholas,

Yan slipped the file into its hollow interior, followed it with a quick wadding-in of his handkerchief, tamped it down with his finger, and carried the Saint Nicholas, so loaded, to one of the guard.

“I don’t want your Saint Nicholas,” the guard said; “why be you fetching it to me?”

“You see that big man in the corner, — Jacob Van Tassel they call him. Well, he be wanting to see Saint Nicholas closer; won’t you take him to him?” asked Yan.

“Oh, go ’long with your nonsense!” responded the man; “soon you ’ll have us all playing with dolls;” but notwithstanding his words, he took the little figure and carried it to Jacob, who put out his chained hands as if most anxious to get it.

“Perhaps it reminds him of home,” said Yan, naïvely.

“It does, lad,” spoke up Jacob Van Tassel, solemnly. “Not since *twelve* o’clock the *night* before Christmas Eve, two year ago, have I as much as touched good Saint Nicholas;” and with a heavy sigh that seemed loaded with discouragement, even to Yan’s ears, he warily slid the file from its hiding-place, and wearily handed back the Saint Nicholas to the guard.

Yan quickly ran over in his mind Jacob’s words, caught at the “*twelve* o’clock the *night* before Christmas Eve,” and, comprehending Jacob’s ruse as quickly as Jacob had comprehended his, he looked at him with bright eyes.

Jacob nodded. It was settled, then, that they should attempt their escape at twelve o’clock that very night. Yan

put out his hands to receive the Saint Nicholas from the guard with a heart that beat as light as down. Yet the escape was by no means sure ; it was only possible. Every now and then he stole a side glance at Nochie's father ; but he had relapsed into his usual silence, and gave no further evidence of even seeing Yan.

By nine the prisoners were asleep, or at least quiet, and the guard was reduced to one man, who sat and smoked and at length himself soundly slept.

Yan, stowed away in a close corner of the hold, and listening sharply, heard a smothered bit of filing going on in Jacob Van Tassel's corner ; but it so blended with the gnawing of the wharf-rats which had taken possession of the ship, that only a keen ear like Yan's detected the difference.

Jacob's fingers worked evenly and fast in the dark. Not an instant was lost, and by ten o'clock the manacle partly severed was wrenched from his left wrist. Then began the slower and more awkward filing upon the right handcuff. As if made of more unyielding metal than the left, it gave way but slowly, atom by atom; and scarcely that, as the file, smoothed by friction, did its work indifferently.

An old timepiece somewhere on the prison ship struck twelve. Yan crept from his corner, past the sleeping guard, to Jacob's side. Seizing the file, he ground upon the stubborn manacle with might and main. If any of the other prisoners heard him or suspected his work, they gave no sign.

Now the cleft was widening. Jacob took the file again, and with a stern

stroke of the grooved iron that cut to his wrist, he lifted his right arm free.

Jacob Van Tassel with both arms at liberty and the chain about his ankle unfastened, what was there to fear? He seized Yan's sleeve, pushed open the door, snapped like a pipe-stem the bolt that held down the hatchway door, stepped out upon deck, and, with Yan at his side, plunged overboard.

The deck-watch started. The splash aroused him like a stroke on his cheek. He went to look overboard. Nothing was to be seen, and nothing more to be heard. Perhaps a big fish had plashed into port and gone out again. This had often happened; there was no cause to arouse any one. His conscience logically quieted, he returned to his snooze in the bow.

XIII.

COMING to the surface, Jacob Van Tassel and Yan swam to an angle in the dock which hid them from notice, and, scrambling up its sides, were on dry land.

As yet, Jacob and Yan had not exchanged a word. Cold and dripping, only stopping to take fresh breath, they ran farther from the city and toward the river. By sunrise they were several miles from the city, and on ground familiar to Nochie's father.

Yan began to lose breath and step; it was evident that he must rest. Then, for the first time, Jacob broke the silence.

“Yan, my lad,” he said, “don’t give out now; we ’ll soon be where it be safer.”

"I know it, Mynheer," said Yan, panting and stumbling; "I be a poor one to break this way."

"Say nothing about it," replied Jacob, huskily; and reaching down he caught the boy in his arms, and, striding over the crusty snow and through icy mud and mire, he came to a halt by the side of a brook, held fast by the ice and protected by a rankling growth of elderberry, witch-hazel, sassafras, and grape-vine.

The yellow-faced sun was already laughing at them over the hill-tops, and flinging a crimson glow upon the morning sky, the bare tree-tops, and snow-laid meadows.

"Yan, my boy, this be glorious!" cried Jacob, placing Yan upon his feet, and stretching his arms and chest to the keen air. "See! to the right there

be a weathercock and a Dutch gable among the trees. Oh, this be fine!" and again he stretched his long arms to the free air.

Yan looked at him. His hair was unkempt, and blew about his face and neck. His face was pallid, and his cheeks were so hollow that Nochie's plump fist would scarcely have filled them; he was hatless, and his clothes, frozen as stiff as pasteboard, were the same jacket and full knickerbockers he had worn the day of his capture.

Yan was more neatly dressed in the suit supplied him by the English officer, though his queue and hat were much awry, and his close jacket and knee-breeches were stiff with the frozen sea-water. In spite of himself, his teeth chattered.

Jacob looked at him. "If we had a

little hot breakfast and fire," he said, "we would do very well."

"Yes, Mynheer, so we would," answered Yan; "but there comes an old man to see why we be trespassing on his land. We must get on."

"That we must, if you be strong enough for it," said Jacob; and together they sprang across the frozen brook, up the bank, and into the woods.

An hour later, and they ventured to emerge from the woods upon the highway. There had evidently been an early skirmish there, or perhaps it had taken place the evening before. The snow was trampled, broken gunstocks lay here and there, and a haversack and battered canteen lay scattered in the road.

"May good Saint Nicholas be always with us!" exclaimed Jacob, picking up

the canteen and haversack. "Here be a mouthful for two big appetites;" and tearing open the haversack, he handed Yan a piece of dried fish and bread, while he eagerly munched a mouthful or two himself, as they hurried on again.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and yet they seemed still far from home. Several times had they hastened from the highway into the woods, as once they heard a drum and fife, another time the voices of men, and a third and fourth time the discharge of guns.

"To-day we *must* be cowards," said Jacob, more as if talking to himself than Yan, "and go skulking through the woods; but, thank Saint Nicholas, it won't be always so."

"No, no, Mynheer," said Yan, wearily; "I be ready to go soldiering whenever I be needed."

“Wait a bit,” said Jacob; “good Saint Nicholas be with us again. Do you see that sledge and oxen down there? We will ride a mile or two;” and down the hill he clambered, Yan doing the same.

They did not stop to see who was the owner of the team, nor what had become of him; but seating themselves upon the sledge, started the oxen forward at a brisker pace than they had ever travelled.

Two miles were journeyed over in this way, when the oxen stopped at a farmhouse-turning.

“That is to tell us, this be their home, and they will take us no further. It is as well; for walking, if less resting, be warmer than riding,” said Jacob; and leaving the sledge, he and Yan again tramped on.

XIV.

THE sun, which had done his best all day to warm and cheer them, now dropped out of sight. Jacob and Yan swallowed the last crumb of the bread and fish, and made ready for the last home-pull.

“You have Saint Nicholas all right?” asked Jacob.

“That I have,” answered Yan, tapping the front of his jacket.

“And you feel yourself?”

“I do,” said Yan, “and not near so hard used as this morning.”

“Then we will run a bit,—not for fear, this time, but to bring us, hearty and warm, to a supper of Katrina’s cooking.”

“Vrouw Van Tassel, with Nochie, the Widow Van Wurmer, and Dinah, be at the George Washington,” said Yan.

“The George Washington!” repeated Jacob; “what be that?”

“The new name for my father’s inn,” answered Yan.

“And a good name,” said Jacob; “but why leave they their own ‘Roost’?”

It was a hard piece of news for Yan to tell. He had been putting it off all day.

“The night I was taken,” he said at last, “they burned your house to the ground.”

Jacob stopped short, murmured something, and went on again, though he stumbled for a few steps.

“Father will find us a good meal,” Yan tried to say cheerily.

“That be so,” said Jacob, straightening his shoulders. “All be fair in war, and I had given them many a good taste of shot from the great goose-gun;” yet he looked neither east nor west, but directly ahead, as, an hour later, they passed his ruined home. Kind night, too, was casting her mantel over the only wall left standing, and hiding the charred limbs of the trees that were close about it.

Oloff Kieft, on the same old bench, moved indoors for winter, sat smoking his long Delft pipe. His hair had frosted and his cheeks wrinkled in the last seventeen months; still his face was as placid as ever. A little dog, curled at his feet, sprang up, and began barking. Oloff listened. There were footsteps on the porch which he knew. He drew his pipe from his mouth, and

called but one word, — “Yan!” It brought the household, with Nochie, Vrouw Van Tassel, the Widow Van Wurmer, and Dinah.

The broad front-door was flung open by a dozen hands; and Jacob and Yan, winking and blinking in the sudden shift from darkness to light stood among them.

There was silence, shouts, tears, laughter, hand-shakes, and embraces; then the worn and weary escapers sank upon a settle in the wide hall.

“You be thin, father!” said Nochie, sliding her plump arm round his neck.

“You be grown tall and like the Onderdoncks, my whipster,” said Oloff to Yan; “why stayed you so long away?”

Yan looked at Nochie, while Jacob laid his broad hand on Yan’s slim arm.



“The broad front door was flung open.”

"Ask him if the good Saint Nicholas be safe, Nochie."

For answer, Yan took it from his jacket, and put it into her hands.

"And the file, Yan?" she questioned; "was that of help?"

Her father told her of its hiding-place, and, in a few words, of their escape.

"That child would go to New York," said the Widow Van Wurmer, coming to them with two bowls of broth, already warmed, for the wayfarers. "I told her I went but to see father Van Wurmer safe buried, and that in these times it be no place for children; still she would —"

"Oh, sister Nochie, this be very good broth," interrupted Jacob, setting his bowl, quite empty, upon her salver.

Nochie was too absorbed in her own thought to notice her aunt's words.

“Good, good Saint Nicholas,” she said, holding him close, “you have brought us all together again, just as I asked you. This be a happy, happy Christmas Eve.”

The next day, Christmas, 1776, the Battle of Trenton was fought, the “Tories” “retreating through New York to New Jersey.”

It is Christmas again. Jacob Van Tassel has rebuilt his home, and swung from the hooks above the kitchen fireplace his great goose-gun.

Only that summer, Nochie and Yan, walking along the Tappan Sea, found upon its sands the body of old Pompey “drownded” indeed, his hands clasping the great goose-gun. Was this his act of restitution, now that the war was over and the “Whigs” had won?

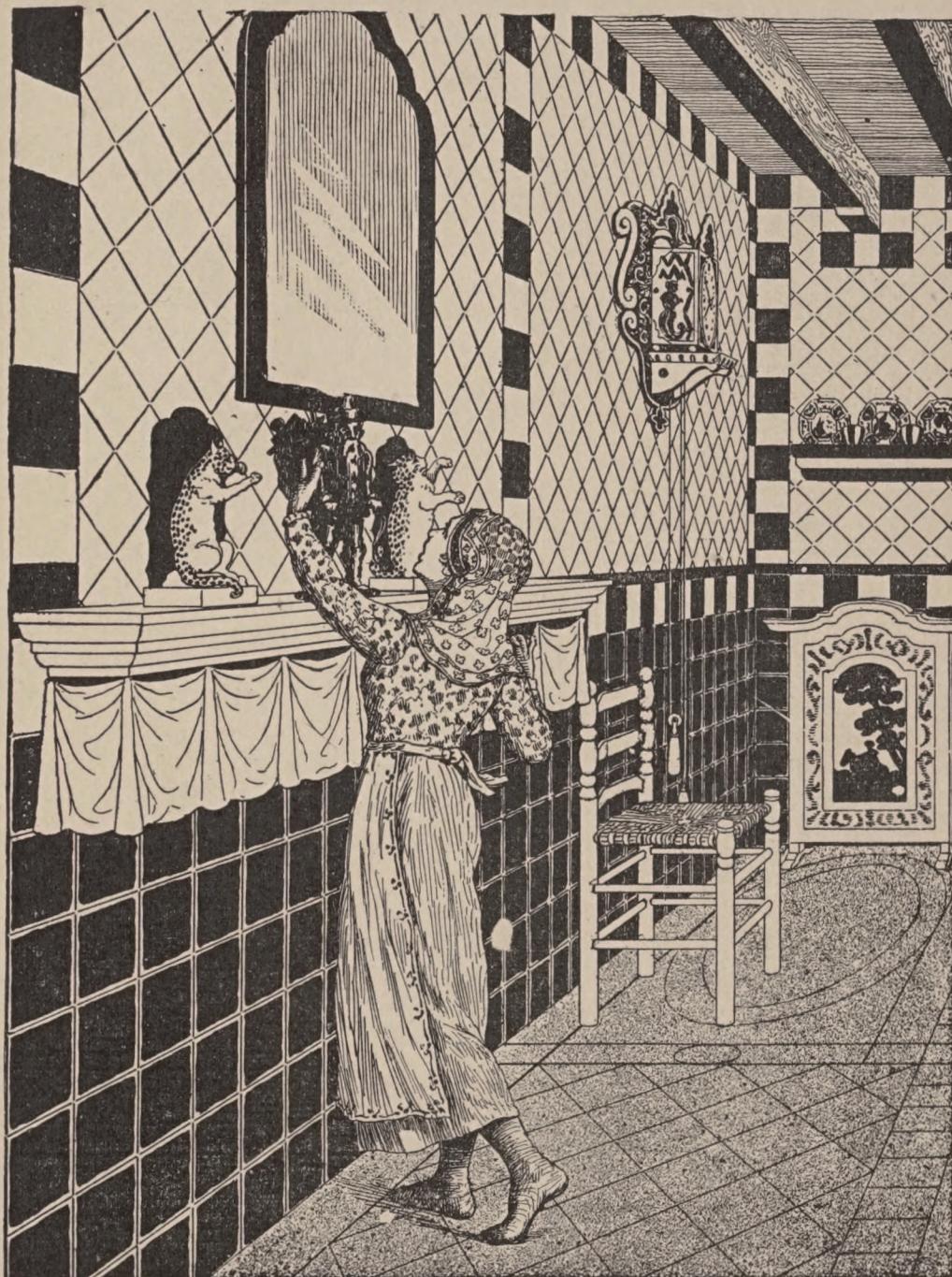
Now, however, the Van Tassel house is gayly lighted; even the staid parlor is ablaze with candle glory, for it is the "Feast of Saint Nicholas."

On the mantel shines their Star of Bethlehem, the metal Saint Nicholas.

THE END.

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